

Illinois Treasurer Frerichs returns Purple Heart to Vietnam War Veteran

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CHICAGO - Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs today returned a Purple Heart Medal to Vietnam War Veteran Harold J. Walker.

The Purple Heart is one of the most recognized and respected medals awarded to a member of the U.S. Armed Forces. Frerichs also returned a Vietnam Service Medal and a National Defense Medal for Walker's service in Vietnam. The honors were discovered in a safe deposit box that was surrendered to the treasurer's office as unclaimed property.

"It is a great honor to return the Purple Heart Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and National Defense Medal to Mr. Walker," Frerichs said. "For Veterans, these honors represent sacrifice and sincere love for this country. We could not be more proud to play a role in this reunion."

Born in Mississippi, Walker moved to Chicago at the age of 18 to live with his mother. He was later drafted into the Army and served as an infantryman in the Vietnam War from 1969-1970 where he earned his Purple Heart.

Following his discharge from the military, Walker returned to Illinois and began a 28-year career with the Illinois Department of Corrections. The military medals were placed in a bank safe deposit box under the names of Walker and another Chicago relative.



Walker retired in 2002 and moved back to Mississippi. Years later, during a visit to Chicago, Walker sought to retrieve the medals. However, the bank had been sold and the medals' whereabouts were unknown. Subsequently, the medals were submitted to the treasurer's office in 2007 as unclaimed property. Frerichs' office was able to locate Walker and arrange for the medals to be returned.

Walker chose to drive to Illinois to receive the long-lost medals because he did not want to risk losing them again.

The treasurer's office has more than 100 unclaimed military medals. Military medals are never auctioned and are kept until the owners or family members are found.

The treasurer's office is the custodian of unclaimed property, including lost bank accounts, insurance policy proceeds, and forgotten safe deposit boxes. Items are surrendered after private entities tried for at least five years to locate the owners. Because thousands of items are surrendered each year, residents should check I-Cash every six months. Visit www.illinoistreasurer.gov/ICASH or call 217-785-6998.

Frerichs' office never charges money to search for unclaimed property.